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Study of Major Beaches, Forts and Historical Tourist Places in Palghar District (MS)

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Abstract:

Palghar district in Maharashtra, along the Arabian Sea, features significant beaches and historical forts that boost regional tourism, livelihoods, and cultural preservation. This study covers nine major beaches Rajode, Kelve, Kalamb, Navapur, Arnala, Shirgaon, Alivadi Uchchili, Dahanu Bordi, and Narbad plus six key forts: Vasai, Arnala, Gambhirgad, Kelva Pankot, Shirgaon, and Kohoj. Using descriptive analysis and secondary data, it assesses physical traits, infrastructure, connectivity, safety, and visitor trends, identifying gaps in sanitation and lifeguards while suggesting sustainable development for enhanced eco-tourism and heritage appeal.

Keywords: Palghar District, Beaches, Forts, Coastal Tourism, Historical Tourism, Maharashtra, Infrastructure, Visitor Trends, Eco-Tourism

Introduction:

Coastal and historical tourism drives economic growth in Palghar district with pristine beaches, colonial forts, tribal heritage, and proximity to Mumbai. Its 720 km Maharashtra coastline segment offers serene escapes and rich history, from Portuguese-era structures to Maratha strongholds. Despite rising visitors seeking nature and culture, uneven infrastructure limits potential; this paper examines beaches and forts to highlight challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism.

Study area:

Palghar district, formed on August 1, 2014, from Thane, spans 4,696.99 sq km at 19°41'49" N, 72°45'49" E, with a population of 2,990,416. It's hot-humid climate (max 40.6°C, min 8.3°C) receives 2,293 mm rainfall, lying between Sahyadri hills and Arabian Sea from Dahanu to Naigaon Comprising eight talukas Jawahar, Mokhada, Talasari, Vasai, Vikramgad, Palghar, Dahanu, Wada it hosts tribes like Katkari, Warli, and Bhil. Tropical coastal weather peaks tourism October–March (20–30°C).

Objectives:

1 To study major beaches, forts, and historical sites in Palghar.
2. Study of tourism infrastructure and facilities.

Research Methodology:

This descriptive qualitative study relies on secondary sources: district tourism records, government reports, research articles and local portals for visitors' data, infrastructure and characteristics.

Major Beaches:

1) Rajode (Rajodi) Beach – Vasai-Virar
A serene and clean beach known for its tranquil environment, semi-secluded stretch, and scenic sunsets. It attracts around **25,000 visitors annually**. Infrastructure is basic, with limited sanitation but decent connectivity (10 km from Virar). Local eateries offer vada pav, bhel, fish curry, and chikoo treats. Safety is moderate with police patrols but no lifeguards.

2) Kelve (Kelva/Kelwe) Beach – Palghar
One of the longest (8 km) and most popular beaches, Kelve Beach recorded **over 100,000 visitors in 2023**. Activities like horse and camel rides are common. Connectivity is strong via Kelve Road and Palghar stations. However, restroom scarcity and waste issues persist. Several mid-range resorts support weekend tourism.

3) Kalamb Beach – Vasai
A peaceful beach known for semi-black sand and eco-friendly ambience. It attracts around **20,000 visitors** annually. Limited facilities and no lifeguards maintain its secluded charm. Connectivity through Nalasopara is good, and several small resorts/homestays exist.

4) **Arnala Beach – Vasai**
A well-known beach near Arnala Fort, attracting **80,000 visitors in 2023**. Though popular, cleanliness is an issue due to crowding and littering. Horse rides, food stalls, and resorts attract families. Infrastructure includes parking and pathways but lacks restrooms and professional safety services.

5) **Dahanu–Bordi Beaches – Dahanu**
A 17-km coastal stretch known for chikoo orchards, calm ambience, and horse rides. One of the top attractions in Palghar, with **90,000 tourists in 2023**. Infrastructure includes parking and stalls, but restrooms and lifeguards are absent. The region is famous for chikoo ice cream and tribal cuisines.

Major Forts and Historical Sites:

1. Vasai Fort:
: Vasai Fort, also known as Bassein Fort, is a historic monument in Vasai taluka, Palghar district, about 45 km from Palghar city. Built by the Portuguese in the 16th century, it was a major naval base and shipbuilding centre. The fort, named after the Vasa Konkani tribes, was captured by the Marathas in 1739 under Chimaji Appa and ceded to the British in 1817 after the Treaty of Bassein (1802), which impacted the Maratha Confederacy. Spanning 4.5 km with 11 bastions, it features ruins of churches, arches, and Portuguese architecture, making it a favourite for history buffs and filmmakers.

2. Arnala Fort:
Arnala Fort, also known as Jaldurg or Janjire Arnala, is a coastal fort in Arnala village, Vasai taluka. Built in 1516 by Sultan Mahmud Begda, it was ruled by the Mughals, Marathas, Portuguese, and Peshwas before being captured by the British in 1817. Surrounded by water, the rectangular fort features temples like Tryambakeshwar, Bhavani Mata, and Mahadev, along with a well. Its scenic location by Arnala Beach makes it a popular spot for history and nature lovers.

3. Gambhirgad Fort:
: Gambhirgad Fort, located in Dahanu taluka near the Gujarat border, is a hill fort known for its rugged, "serious" ambiance, as its Marathi name suggests. Built during the Maratha period, it was a strategic lookout point. The fort's plateau, or machi, has wild vegetation, a water tank, and a goddess temple. It offers views of Mahalakshmi pinnacle and forts like Asheri and Adsul, making it a trekker's delight despite its minimal ruins.

4. Kelva Pankot Fort (Sea Fort):
: Kelva Fort, also called Kelva Pankot Fort, is a 16th-century Portuguese sea fort near Kelva Beach in Palghar taluka. Located by Kelva Lake, it was used by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as a lookout. Surrounded by water, the fort offers panoramic views of the Arabian Sea and lush greenery, making it a scenic spot for history and nature enthusiasts, though it's now in ruins.

5. Shirgaon Fort:
: Shirgaon Fort, located by Shirgaon Beach in Palghar taluka, was a Maratha stronghold used by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj to monitor Arabian Sea enemies. Built by the Portuguese in 1714, it was captured by the

Marathas in 1738 and later by the British in 1818. The 200x150-foot fort has a 35-foot-high bulwark, four bastions, and a rare multi-branched palm tree, attracting history buffs and photographers.

6. Kohoj Fort:

: Kohoj Fort, a hill fort in Palghar taluka, was built during the Maratha era and later controlled by the Portuguese and British. Located near Vaghote village, it's a popular trekking spot with a 2.5-hour moderate climb through paddy fields and forests. The fort features a Shiva temple,
water cisterns, and a wind-carved rock resembling a man, offering stunning views of the surrounding hills.

Challenges:

Across sites: no restrooms, lifeguards, poor waste management, littering, limited info centres, Beaches face crowding; forts have slippery trails.

Recommendations:

1. Build sanitation/water blocks and lifeguard units.
2. Improve waste/eco-practices and signage/kiosks.
3. Promote community / tribal tourism.
4. Enhance digital info and hospitality.

Conclusion:

Palghar's beaches and forts offer untapped potential through natural beauty and history, with growing visitors (2023 peaks at 150,000). Addressing infrastructure gaps via sustainable initiatives can elevate it as a Mumbai getaway hub.

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